Lesson 5

THE PERIL ZEPHANIAH SAW (Zephaniah 1)

The book identifies the author as the great, great grandson of the good and righteous king, Hezekiah (v. 1), who reigned in Jerusalem 715-687 BC, although the last portion of his reign he was co-regent with his son, Manasseh.

It is unusual to list four generations in identifying a person. The reason for this would be to show his relationship to a very important person and to align him with the same principles of government, i.e. those dedicated to Yahweh.

His father's name is Cushi. This is an Egyptian name, showing that this man was born at the time when the parents thought Egypt was the hope of Judah against Assyria. It reveals the confusion the nation faced during these perilous times.

His own name, Zephaniah, means "Yahweh hides." It indicates a time when there was uncertainty about the activity of Yahweh in their midst, while at the same time suggesting a faith in the potential presence of Yahweh among them.

The opening words "The word of the LORD" generally indicate a technical term for oracle or for prophecy. This shows something of the faith his contemporaries had in Zephaniah's message as coming from God. In fact, at this time there was no other way to affirm the presence of God except through such a message. There had been such a long period of silence of the prophetic voice that it must have been a thrill to his hearers for Zephaniah to speak as he did.

Record of Prophetic Activity

There is no record of any other prophetic activity of Zephaniah. It is the force of the message that carried its own authority. It is direct, free from anecdotes from his life and the reaction to his message. It reflects youth but one whose insights appear far beyond his physical age.

G. A. Smith suggested (p. 47) that Zephaniah died young, burned out from his efforts to spread his message. No doubt he was a man devoted to his task, driven by his concern for the impending disaster. Anyone can ruin his health this way; but does God expect his men to abuse themselves for the cause of God? Modern ministers need to have a good answer to this dilemma.

Surely these passages grew out of the prophet's awareness of God's concern for his people. God is aware of man, the prophet becomes aware of God. The prophet must warn his people that God's awareness means judgment.

The Political Annihilation (1:2-6)

The sweep of this threat amazes the reader (v. 2) The message begins with a generalization that God will soon utterly consume all, i.e., bring all society to an end. The conditions in Jerusalem must have been tragic for these words to have had the ring of possibility. Imagine fi the people were truly aware of the intent of the prophet.

Verse 5 pictures the people using the flat roofs over their houses as places of worship of heathen idols and the heavenly hosts at the same time. Jerusalem has become a thriving center for such worship.

It is generally not wise to make such sweeping statements. No one feels targeted when the preacher fires at them with such a scatter blast. It seems to most that the preacher is always talking about others.Yet, some generalization may have the desired effects at times such as Zephaniah's.

Inclusiveness of this threatened judgment (vv. 3-6)

Sweeping away "both men and animals" indicates some external force against the city. It would not be some illness, or disease, or some physical catastrophe, but an external force that would move across the land. Historians describe the movement of the Scythians in these terms. Had Zephaniah read the reports of the government agents who reported to the king?

Anew start must be anticipated since the Lord has determined to "cut off man from the face of the earth" (v. 36); "all who live in Jerusalem" (v. 4a) will experience God's judgment.

The prophet describes reasons why God would take such action:

a. The land is full of foreign and idolatrous priests.

b. They had filled the land with their foreign customs

c. Foreign idols and temples prevailed in the land. It has been going on since the time of Solomon who brought in so many foreign wives in his political strategy.

The temple of Yahweh built nearly 400 years earlier was closed, its walls decaying, its rooms collecting rubbish.

Manasseh's revival had failed. We recall that he and his son Amon had all but abolished the worship of Yahweh. Two generations of Judah knew little of the true worship of their forefathers.

Evidences that the people were following foreign worship:

- Remnants of Baal (v. 4b)
- idolatrous priests (v. 4b)
- Assyrian religion of star worship (v. 5a) Mixed worship: worshiping both the Lord and Molech (v. 5b)

- Many apostates-forsaking Yahweh entirely (v. 6)

The Lord's Sacrifice (1:7)

It's time to worship —be silent. The Lord himself leads the worship; Judah is the sacrifice. The enemy armies are invited guests —or executioners.

The Lord is ready to act

The prophet displays his view of God's control over history. God may be waiting on man to attain either goodness or evil and will act accordingly. Can we find a parallel in the theory that Christ has delayed his return until the church has fulfilled its task or so miserably failed that intervention will be necessary?

History is moving towards a conclusion

People throughout the ages have tried to understand the meaning of events and the goal of history. For some people, history is circular or cyclical. That is, all are involved in a series of repetitious events. The Greeks have described history as a "wheel of unending recurrences." A period of growth followed by a period of decay is repeated again and again. In such a cycle, man becomes a pawn, not a mover. He is a victim, rather than a molder of history. It is tragic for a person to feel involved in life in such a manner. He loses his will to resist difficult circumstances that often surround him.

The prophets do not interpret history in that way. In fact, the whole Bible presents a linear and climactic view of history. History has a beginning and an end as well as a precise purpose or direction. The "Day of the Lord" that Zephaniah preached was an important moment in a series of events that lead to God's ultimate reign.

The same idea appears in the thought of Jesus as he looks towards the last judgment. It will be the climax of human history when all peoples of the earth will stand before the Son of Man as he comes in all his glory (Mt. 25:31).

Those Under God's Judgment (1:8-9,12-13)

The leaders of the people, first of all (vv. 8-4)

Zephaniah singles out the political leaders who seem out of line with those who wished to institute religious reforms. Note he does not include Josiah because he is probably innocent of these crimes. Note the offenses the prophet mentioned:

a. Dressed in foreign attire that the prophet considered a sign of political and religious disloyalty, which he believes is a hint of softness (cf. Mt. 11:8).

b. Practicing religious superstition. " . . who avoid stepping on the threshold." This probably was an ancient practice of the priests of Dagon after the Philistines captured the ark of the Lord and placed it in their temple, only to have the heathen idol fall over during the night with its head and arms landing on the threshold

1(Sam. 5:1ff). Whatever that statement exactly meant, it was a specific foreign religious practice by Judah. Obviously, this was against God's will.

It is interesting how modern believers will fall into the habit of foolish heathen practices such as:

- not walking under a ladder

- not taking a bath on holy Friday

- taking evasive actions of a black cat

c. Engaging in violence. The prophet denounced those who engage in vice and violence instead of virtue, especially in the name of religion.

d. Fraud in their official positions in government.

The indifferent people themselves (vv. 12, 13)

Complacency is the sin of omission. One does not escape God's scrutiny because he does not participate in evil. God is searching them out from their hiding places. This is an interesting figure of God looking through the dark places of the city seeking those who think they are safe, staying out of trouble, doing nothing about the evil about them.

Did such people believe God removed himself from history, or that he was not taking any part in what was happening? Apparently it didn't matter to them (v. 12c).

Zephaniah uses a striking figure of these people... like wine left on its dregs." Wine needs to be stirred, poured from vat ot vat, or it will thicken, lack strength, and soon spoil. Thus this statement had become a Hebrew proverb for laziness, indifference, and apathy. Jeremiah (48:11) will use the proverb against the nation Moab who had grown soft in her peaceful coexistence. Why did the prophet apply it to his time? a. Were there those who previously had high hopes for reform when Josiah first came to the throne but who now were so disappointed? Why were things allowed to remain the same for so long? b. Were there those who had profited by existing circumstances and grown content with the status quo? Many young Christians, idealistic in their initial dedication, fall victim to this condition as they face hard circumstances, opposition, and the rigors of daily living. The true Christian must be aware of the danger and rely solely on Christ's power to fulfill his/her dreams.

The Extent of the Day of the Lord (1:10-11,14-18)

Beginning at Jerusalem (vv. 10-11)

The places mentioned here seem to be on the north side of the city, the direction from which the invaders would attack. There is no reference ot them being more wicked than the others, just to dreadful wailing across the city.

Note the references within Jerusalem:

a. The Fish Gate was the north entrance to the city.

b. The New Quarter was probably a section recently added, maybe even an extension of the walls.

c. The hills must have been a higher section of the city itself, not to those hills outside.

d. The market district (literally Mortar or Makesh), in contrast to the hills, where the merchants transacted business, refining silver or other monies, would perish.

Immediate and bitter (vv. 14-16)

Thomas of Celano based his 13th century hymn ("Dies Irae", meaning "The Wrath of God") on these verses:

Day of wrath! O day of mourning! See fulfilled the prophet's warning. Heav'n and earth in ashes burning! O what fear man's bosom rendeth When from heav'n the judge descendeth On whose sentence all dependeth!

The force of the passage is in its brevity and clarity — imminent, painful, devastating, gloomy. Verses 15 and 16 show that this judgment is both natural and external.

a day of clouds and blackness. Remember that during at least half the year it did not rain at all. This was a real storm.

a day of trumpets. This would be a time of war.

Distressful (v. 17)

To describe them as walking like blind people would mean all the things in which they trusted no longer exist. They had no security but groped from place to place. The evil in which they had engaged had now moved over them like a river. They were being washed away ni the flood.

Certain

Certain (vv. 17b-18a)

Suddenly they have a bill they cannot pay. Al their wealth will not bribe the judge. This is interesting, if it is a reference ot the excessively large bribe Pharaoh paid the Scythians not to invade Egypt when they arrived at his border.

The citizens of Jerusalem had nothing but themselves left with which to face their God and that was nothing worthwhile. They had previously refused to accept the presence of God (v. 12c) and thus cast aside all proper religious values. "The god man worships is the god he must face in judgment."

Universal (v. 18b)

God will not stop with Jerusalem and Judah. The time is near when God will deal with evil everywhere. The prophet sees no alternative but to end all lives that are barren and meaningless.

One may feel some concern with such an expectation as expressed by Zephaniah... "the whole world will be consumed."

This shows the fervor in the heart of the young prophet. He reflects the conclusion of the remnant of his times.

SUMMARY

a. Judgment is certain and it is a horrible prospect to consider. The scrutiny of the almighty God will find all men and judge accurately the lives of those called into account. However, the prophet cannot cease his preaching with judgment; there has to be hope. The next message (Zeph. 2) will examine this. It grows out of repentance and expected changes in life.

b. One can imagine the effect such revelation would have on a young man such as Zephaniah. It was strangely dark and final. Such is often the case when judgment is deserved-there is simply no way out.

c. God is a God of judgment. Let us not preach the love of Christ and the fatherhood of God to the extent that we forget he judges the world today. Remember the words of Paul:

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness a n d wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. Romans 1:18-19

THE PREDICTIONS OF JUDGMENT (Zephaniah 2)

The first message of Zephaniah is a vivid description of the expected Day of Yahweh. It caused the prophet to pause and insert a word of escape and hope.

However, the apparent indifference of the people to the message must have been very discouraging to this young man. They had not properly responded as he spoke of the impending sweeping away of all things.

He not only is challenging them to repent. He wants them to learn from what God has done ni history and from what is happening to the neighboring countries.

The Call to Collective Consultation (2:1-3)

Projecting a new idea

The idea of holding a solemn assembly over the problem faced by the nation seems worthy of consideration. This probably is to be an assembly of fasting and repentance, seeking God for help and guidance. The judgment of God may be averted if Judah stops and reconsiders her ways. The examination must precede the cure.

The idea of reaching aconclusion through group discussion has proven itself of immense value. Group therapy sessions are gaining momentum. Church business meetings are intended to be like this. Faculty meetings, councils, cabinets al theoretically function on this basis.

Zephaniah's intent

The true meaning of this call - "gather together" — is uncertain of meaning. Ordinarily the Hebrew speaks of gathering sticks for a fire. However, one has suggested that the real meaning here is: "Carefully examine your souls and be ashamed" (Hastings). Another suggests it means "Be ashamed together and feel ashamed" (Interpreter's Bible, Vol. VI, 1021). The NIV translation fits the context as well as any. "Gather together, gather together, O shameful nation."

An overlooked resource (v. 3)

The resource of the humble of the land is often overlooked. It would take an assembly as suggested here for them to have a hearing. Unless directly called upon for their opinion they usually remain in the back- ground.

Consulting the humble is a way of staying in touch with the people who are most affected by the decisions of the powerful. It is the "grass roots" contact that the politicians would do well to have some opportunity to hear. Churches need some method of listening to the members who ordinarily have no places of leadership.

There is an encouragement here for all to speak out when they have ideas. Maybe one simple idea added to others will be the very things needed to bring forth the proper conclusion.

Involving the nation

The nation is spoken of as shameful (v. 1) reflecting their rejection of the words of God formerly spoken by the prophets.

Reaching out of the confines of the court, the temple, and even the city, the prophet hopes there are a few within the nation on whom her futurecan rest... a few humble

and lowly in heart. Since judgment will affect all, all should be called in to search for ways of escape. No avenue of hope should be neglected.

There is here a very universal appeal, ageless in its application and challenge. It has its application even today.

Reasons for Heeding Such a Call (2:2)

The extent of the danger involved

Everything they had was about to go! Their personal lives was uncertain. The people little realize their situation but the prophet does not trifle with the danger they face. The Scythians could wipe out the nation, as they have others.

The time for action is before God's wrath

Zephaniah does not mention God's mercy. He only sees the pure facts that evil brings judgment; repentance brings forgiveness. His view of God insists on strictly adhering to the cause and effect principle.

In a way, this is the rule of God by fear. God chastises those who do not act properly. Fear of this judgment is to keep men in line. There is amessage of love of God, but the idea of the wrath of God surely dominated Zephaniah.

The possibility of that day is imminent

When one gains insights that others do not have, the responsibility for passing along warnings is vast. It is evident that the prophet feels the burden of that task.

Directions for Effectiveness Suggested (2:3)

Prayer: "Seek the Lord"

No good would come from just holding a meeting without the right things taking place. The primary object of their quest was to find God himself. This takes on added significance—when we recall the history of their absence from God for such a long time. Not for wt o generations had there been a revival in their relations to God.

Obedience: "Seek righteousness"

Observance of God's revealed will is vital. There seems to be little difference in essence in seeking God and seeking righteousness. In fact, one was so certain to folow the other that it could serve as a means of knowing if contact was secure with God.

Humble living: "Seek humility"

The final result of finding God is in living for him. It is a quality that cannot be manufactured. It is a by-product. Those who possess it are the real hope of the nation.

Note that it is these humble persons that the prophet is addressing. They could not have held high places in government, etc. This points out that God will honor the righteousness of a few in any land.

One wonders how many righteous persons would there have been in Sodom for God to spare that city. Perhaps Abraham stopped praying too soon. Maybe he thought there were ten righteous people in the city, considering that Lot and his family were there.

Possible Escape for a Few (2:3b)

Remnant idea

The remnant idea had received much emphasis in the messages of Isaiah. Amid all the evil people of any generation there are some who maintain the faith.

The "silent believers" need to make themselves known. Recall that Elijah thought he was alone in his faith to Yahweh, yet there were 7,000 who never had bowed to Baal 1(Kings 19:18).

A hope of possible escape was all the prophet could give. It was not a certainty. All he said was:

*"**PERHAPS** you will be sheltered on the day of the Lord's anger"* (emphasis added).

None could hide from God but perhaps God would hide them.

The remnant idea essentials noted:

a. Not reformation or reform ... as Josiah had attempted

b. Not ritualism which the people knew too well

c. Not multipler eligions and conflicting ideologies

d. Not social opportunity for all

e. Simple humility and faith by all who sincerely seek God

Too many churches would prepare for the future in the light of great programs and great buildings. In contrast, the prophet looked to the future in the lives of the poor, the humble and honest members.

The remnant idea emphasizes 'being' over 'doing'

What one does is vitally important but we can deceive so easily. A person can tell the truth but not be truthful. One can worship but not be a Christian. One could be a brave soldier, a skilled surgeon, an efficient public servant and not be a good person.

Life is departmentalized. Whatever department people see in us is the way they think of us.

The prophet looked for people who had the proper lives because their hearts were right. He expected the outgrowth of their inner lives to save the nation.

Lessons to be Learned for Judgments on Others (2:4-15)

Basic theme

God is not dealing exclusively with one nation, but si against sin in all places. The prophet hopes by calling attention to the way the wrath of God works in other nations that his people will repent and have a change of heart. This would then save them from further destruction.

Oracle against Philistia (vv. 4-7)

Four of the five great cities of Philistia aré mentioned. Scholars believe Uzziah destroyed Gath 760 BC (ef. 2 Chron. 26:6). Al of these prophecies were fulfilled about the remaining centers.

a. Gaza was taken by Pharaoh Neco; ca. 606 BC

b. Ashdod was overrun by Sargon I in 71 BC

c. Ekron and Ashkelon were taken by Sennacherib in 701

Some of the cities may have been rebuilt at a later time since there are references of later invasions and more destruction noted in later tablets. The destruction of the cities would flow into the surrounding countryside (v.5). The Philistines settled in this coastal region about 1200 BC. It has been suggested they came originally from the island of Crete (ef. Amos 9:7).

David used the "Kerethite people" (vv. 5-6) as bodyguards. Con- sequently, we conclude this is another name for the Philistines.

The Philistine nation would be destroyed so completely that the Jewish remnant would pasture their flocks in this area (vv. 6b-7). This description pictures a time of extended peace in the land and gives some insight into the expected activities of the remnant after the judgment.

The reason for all this action is in Yahweh their God (v. 7). His ultimate purpose will cause him to make a new start. He is fully aware of the true situation. He is not so far removed that the activities of the humble are unnoticed. We realize that God is more than a spectator. He is the supreme ruler of all his creation.

Moab and Ammon

Oracle against Moab and Ammon (vv. 8-11)

The Moabites and Ammonites were both descendants of Lot. The prophet places them here together because of their common action and proximity to each other on the east side of Judah across the Jordan river.

They had reproached the Jews and rejoiced in their calamities (v. 8a). Their criticism likely is in the attitude Judah officially had towards monotheism, while other nations were polytheistic. It was their own pride that made them speak of Judah as they had. God was listening! The "insults" were probably actions annexing some of the land of Judah, thereby disregarding the sovereignty and rights of the nation (v. 8b).

God's judgment is indiscriminating (v. ga). Even alien nations are responsible ot him. These foreign nations may worship their false gods but the true God will bring them to judgment for it.

Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 9b; cf. Gen. 19:24ff) serve as representatives of the calamitous judgment these nations can expect. Those two cities never were rebuilt.

Useless bushes and wind driven salt were expected to replace the destroyed cities, indicating a total lack of inhabitants. The remnant of Judah shall pass through and take such plunder as is left behind.

Oracle against Ethiopia (v. 12)

It is interesting that the prophet makes such a small reference here to the Ethiopians. This has caused some commentators to suggest this is a marginal note added by some later writer and then incorporated into the text when copied. However, this reference completes the circle East, West, North and South. The note of God's judgment being "my sword" would be some external force God directed against this nation. It also is a reminder that those who live by the sword are judged by it.

Oracle against Assyria (vv. 13-15)

The words Zephaniah delivered against Assyria could have been believed earlier because of the great world-wide power that the nation was. Many of his contemporaries still would not believe such was a possibility.

The same terms are used here that previously were used against other nations. This has led some to conclude a common force against all these nations. However this need not be true.

However, the extent of judgment against Assyria came as prophesied. It would be a place for the desert owl, rubble would be in every door and wild animals call it their home. People who passed it would be amazed at the fall of such greatness. Their memory of the evil of the city would cause them to scoff and shake their fists.

For the prophet to express a shred of hope for the Jewish remnant was an act of faith in the mercy and power of Yahweh.

SUMMARY

a. The utter destruction shown in the surrounding nations had all come from human pride. This is the fate of the proud. Many similiar warnings fill the Old Testament; e.g. Isa. 47:1ff (Babylon); Ezek. 27:1ff (Tyre).

b. The sobering reality that Judah is surrounded by people whose actions bring God's judgment indicates they are in the middle of bad circumstances. People cannot live in such environments without being affected themselves. This was the idea of Amos (Chron. 1).

c. The hint of universal worship of the true God is implied in the idea of universal judgment of those nations who are not worshiping Yahweh (v. 11). The idea of monotheism leads to the idea of one people.

d. There is no explanation here of the idea of universalism, as some expositors would wish. The prophet voices his conviction of his con- fidence that after judgment all people would be one family under Yahweh. There is no other way for it to be possible.

THE PROMISE OF AN ULTIMATE FUTURE (Zephaniah 3)

Zephaniah 3 reveals some lapse of time since the preceding messages. Perhaps the prophet waited to see if there were any recognizable changes noted.

This suggests to us that our own messages need constant re- evaluation because of changing circumstances. Old sermons can be repreached, if changing circumstances so demand them.

This chapter is a mixture of threats and promises; but there is a unity of thought moving from the gloomy present ot the brighter future.

Description of the Dismal Present (3:1-7)

The prophet's evaluation of the city itself (vv. 1, 2)

Uncertain that the "humble" have responded to his call sufficiently, if at all, the prophet sees nothing but woe for the rebellious people. The city is apostate - "rebellious and defiled." How tragic that this would be true in view of al God had done in their history to bring Jerusalem to that moment.

Chosen as the place where God's name would be honored

The center of Judaistic religion

Housing the majestic temple built by Solomon

The evil influences of their society overcame the good. The city wronged her inhabitants and her neighbors equally. Judaism's many laws abounded on right conduct; but they had adequate loopholes to allow anything of the privileged.

A city results from the kind of leadership it has. Thus, the prophet turns his attention to their sins and those leaders who were responsible for them.

Specific failures are noted:

Obstinacy (v. 2a): The city had listened to no voice for guidance. Perhaps this is a reference to the long period of prophetic silence. How- ever, nothing will silence a preacher faster than for the people to pay no attention to him.

Pride (v. 2b): Having learned one way of action, "she accepts no correction." This is a poetic elaboration of the previous statement—-a common prophetic method.

Skepticism (v. 2c): There was total lack of trust in God in spite of the constant calls going out from prophets like Zephaniah. Instead they were trusting in foreign powers.

Irreligion (v. 2d): Cessation of worship by many evidenced that all God had been doing for them had not reformed their thinking.

Defective leadership is at the heart of the distress (vv. 3-4)

The princes or officials (v. 3) received their positions by birth into the royal family. They were making a prey of all those around them. There is an indication here that they felt their position entitled them to all resources the nation could provide. The figure of speech used in this verse suggests they instilled fear in the populace. They sounded like lions and were feared as such by the helpful people. They may have had the power of life and death over the subjects. It is evident they had not hesitated to use it.

The prophets were arrogant (v. 4a). This verse revealed there still were "professional prophets." How might they be described? Can we find such in modern times?

The priests also failed (v. 4b). They did things in the sanctuary that profaned it, plus they twisted the law to their own benefits or to that of those who paid them well. The role of the priest in Israel was to pre- serve and expound the law of Moses. They were the authors of the loopholes. They interpreted the word of God to their own benefit.

A word of warning should be noted here about professionals in religion. Many of us need to heed such a warning. There are two major dangers: professionalism and insensitivity. It can happen that one per- forms for God without possessing the presence of God. We can learn to preach, to lead worship, to appear religious but not be. We can become immune to the needs of people as a defense against all the demands made on us.

The contrast of God's presence (v. 5)

The rising of the sun showed God's control "morning by morning" (cf. Psa. 19:1-2). God is as dependable in the realm of human relations as he is in nature. However, those who are without shame before God can only expect to know God in judgment.

Unlearned from world events (vv. 6-7)

Judah had not learned the lessons of history. She was even more wicked than Israel before her (cf. Ezek. 23).

There were many examples of what Judah could expect:

The seven nations of Canaan were driven out to make place for Israel when they came from Egyptian bondage. (cf. Lev. 18:28)

Neighboring nations, specially Israel, had been devoured by her enemies. God had allowed it to happen. (cf. Ezek. 23:9,11)

Their neighbor's house was on fire and they thought there was no danger to their own. We either learn the lessons of history or suffer the same consequences.

Expectation of a Glorious Future (3:8-20)

In this final section of his prophecy, Zephaniah turns to the future and projects an outline of things to come. Beginning with what he expects soon to happen and looking into the final state, the prophet promises that God's action is redemptive.

Universal cleansing by fire (v. 8)

First he expresses the true attitude of believers: "wait for me." Then God announces that he will be both judge and witness against the wicked nations. He alone can judge perfectly and at the same time give the full evidence of their sins. Has this prophecy been fulfilled? Or is it yet to come? The day of the Lord did come, the people met their judgment. The remnant survived. Al as predicted. Yet, this was not the universal judgment that the prophet saw was necessary. The idea was preserved for the New Testament and postponed, as described, until the parousia. Then was Zephaniah wrong? No! He spoke in principles. His time- table was not in accord with God's. Will these things ever come to pass as shown? We must act and believe that the principles do endure, as stated here and restated in the New Testament.

Conversion of the nations (vv. 9-10)

Note the evidences presented:

a. *Universal language*. It is likely that Zephaniah thought it would be Hebrew. We recall that the confounding of the tongues at the tower of Babel is the biblical

explanation for the divisions among nations. The experience at Pentecost lends credence to the idea of a final universal language when the Holy Spirit dominates.

b. *United worship*. Other deities that he has mentioned (1:4f) will no longer be recognized by the people. Calling on the NAME was important. To call the name of the deity was to exercise some sort of power with the deity. The name of the Jewish God became so sacred that we actually do no know how to pronounce it. In refusing to pronounce it them- selves for so long the Hebrews forgot how it should have been spoken. We think we know today but we cannot be certain since we only have the consonants of their word . . . . YHWH.

c. *Unlimited service*. The figure of speech here, "shoulder to shoulder," expresses the idea of total cooperation. Can you possibly imagine what would happen in any place if all the Christians were so united?. . . or even if all the Baptists were? What might God do through them?

d. *Unhindered fellowship*. Those who have been driven far from their homes will freely return to the presence of God. It was the hope of every Jew that he could again live in Jerusalem in a restored and glorified city. The same remains true today. Jews around the world will close important feasts with the parting: "Next year in Jerusalem!"

Security for the remnant (vv. 11-13)

God will take away from his surviving people any remaining reproach for their sins. The removal of the hypocrites will affect the remnant. The influence of the humble will prevail. Purity and peace will be ex- perienced in words and actions. Therefore, the remnant lives without fear from any quarter.

The Golden Age (vv. 14-20)

Using Jerusalem again (v. 14) as the symbol of the redeemed com- munity, the prophet notes the blessings of the Lord and his expectations when the day of the Lord comes. There are three aspects here:

a. Note what God was expected to have done (v. 15)

Removed judgments... Those that were attributable to their sins, the cloud over their day, and the guilt always before them would be gone forever. (cf. Rom. 8:1)

Destroyed enemies... The pressures that had led them astray are restrained. Temptation itself will be gone. The promise we have is for the final destruction of Satan himself.

Abide with them ... Security is truly based on the presence of the Lord in their midst. This is the promise Jesus gave in the Great Commission, i.e. to be with us until the end.

b. Note what God expected the redeemed to do (v. 14, 16)

Express praise with all their ability (v. 14)

Live without fear ... in faith(v.16a)

This must have been a great contrast to what they felt when the news of the Scythians became known and they seemed ready to fight against the city.

Be diligent in service. No reason to be idle when the Lord is directing and giving power (v. 16b). The figure of speech is interesting to imagine.. "hands hanging limp" ...nothing to do! Unused hands reflect an unused heart.

c. Note the expressions of God's continuing actions (v. 17ff)

He will save. Salvation is eternal. God gives victory.

He takes great delight in his own. He gives fellowship as only God could intend.

He calms us with his love. It's true rest. One of the prevalent ideas of heaven is that of rest for weariness of earthly burdens. It's the silent power of God's love.

He will include the excluded (v. 19). Because of deformities many were not permitted to share in some of the temple services. Al defects will be removed. The creator shall re- create as necessary.

He will give rewards for their service (v. 20b).

Recognition of service rendered

Respect and honor for many who served without it

Restored fortunes... i.e. given all they ever need

SUMMARY

The prophet closes with a remark signifying he felt all this was imminent (cf. v. 20c). "... when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes." He expected these promises to be fulfilled in their lifetimes. The time was at hand. He could see no other solution ot the problems of evil and to the approaching Scythians. He was confident they would be used by God against Judah.

One comes away from this book filled with respect for a man who had new insight into the ability of God. The actions about his world had meaning. The hand of God was at work. Let us not grow weary if God, in his great mercy, delays the judgment we know si so richly deserved.

The challenge to ethical application of our cherished beliefs brings each day into clearer focus of responsibility. We cannot be satisfied merely to preach God's requirements. We must meet them in our own lives. What we are today, we are becoming tomorrow; for today we are creating all our tomorrows.